A photograph of a man with glasses and a yellow checkered shirt, pointing his right index finger directly at the camera. He is holding a white document in his left hand. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom setting.

Vern Harrison with Gallatin Steel talks with students at Gallatin County Middle School in Warsaw, encouraging them to become a Kentucky Scholar and take a prescribed list of more rigorous classes to help ensure they are ready for college or a career.

# KENTUCKY

## PARTNER

An initiative that encourages students to make better choices with a clear road map of tougher high school courses in order to ensure greater success in their future



Mark Santen, front center, also with Gallatin Steel, serves as a business mentor in Kentucky Scholars and speaks with eighth-grade students at Gallatin County Middle School. He talks with students, left to right, Alyssa Six, Antonio Garcia Jr., Kennedy Lafferty, and Cody Knoell. Other mentors include Vern Harrison, back left, Gallatin Steel, and Tom Berringer, back right, of Berringer Drug Center in Sparta. Back center is Larry Vaught of Gallatin County Middle School.



# SCHOLARS

## FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOLS

**T**his past May, a group of businesspeople came into Gallatin County Middle School on a difficult mission: to get eighth-graders interested in their futures.

Actually, the mission was even dicier than that: trying to get the middle school students to take actions today—actions that, in the near term, might make the students' lives a little more difficult, in order

to improve their lives in a decade or so.

All the speakers had were a PowerPoint presentation, their own experiences, an hour or so of the students' time, and a handful of uncomfortable facts about typical household expenses, competition in the

global marketplace, and the long school days of Japanese students.

All the stuff teenagers love best.

Did it work?

The real proof will come in spring 2013, when these students graduate from high school and it will be possible to count how many earned the Kentucky Scholars diploma—the recognition that was being pitched that afternoon.

Following those presentations, a num-

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by James Nold Jr.  
photos: Tim Webb



## PARTICIPATING KENTUCKY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

**T**he following school districts are currently participating in the Kentucky Scholars program:

Bath County	Jackson Independent
Boone County	Jessamine County
Campbellsville Independent	Kenton County
Carter County	Madison County
Carroll County	Marion County
Christian County	Montgomery County
Clark County	Nelson County
Covington Independent	Paintsville Independent
Erlanger Schools	Paris Independent
Floyd County	Somerset Independent
Gallatin County	

For more information, call Polly Marquette at (859) 321-6512 or go to the Kentucky Scholars Web site at [www.kyscholars.com](http://www.kyscholars.com).

ber of students and parents signed a pledge expressing the students' interest in becoming Kentucky Scholars.

"It really changed my mind about high school—on what classes I need to pursue for my career," Cody Noell of Warsaw says a month later. The aspiring meteorologist, who will enter Gallatin County High School this fall, was only planning to take classes that relate to weather; now he plans to take four years of math and science.

### IT'S THE COURSES THAT MATTER

Those words, in all capital letters, are repeated twice on the Web site for the Kentucky Scholars initiative.

They express its core principle—encouraging Kentucky high school students to take a more rigorous schedule of courses, in order to better prepare them for college and careers, by giving them special recognition when they graduate.

Kentucky Scholars is part of a national initiative whose seed money is funded by the U.S. Department of Education; it's part of the Partnership at New Cities, a nonprofit arm of the Kentucky League of Cities. It currently has programs in 21 Kentucky school districts (see sidebar above).

It consists, at root, of two simple steps,

at either end of a student's high school career: presentations to eighth-graders by business leaders in the school districts, and recognition of high school graduates who've met the requirements (see sidebar on page 33).

The program's approach is based on a body of research that shows that course selection in high school is the best predictor of college and career success—that a high GPA doesn't count for much if it has been achieved by ducking hard work; and that no year in high school, not even the hallowed and oft-slacked senior year, should be wasted.

"You hear about 'senioritis' and students wanting to goof off their senior year—we want to do just the opposite," says Larry Vaught, career and technical education coordinator for Gallatin County schools. "We want to make them make their senior year count."

Kentucky Scholars is aimed at motivating a group of students who might not otherwise be persuaded to take difficult courses: not the top students, the definitely college-bound types, but the group below them academically—a group that, as Vaught puts it, "doesn't know for sure whether they're going to go to college or not."

"It's really about reaching deeply into

the student body, to get to those kids who might not have that encouragement or motivation at home," says Polly Marquette, Kentucky Scholars director.

The program uses business leaders as pitchmen on the theory that they might have a unique power as presenters. "Maybe a businessperson can make a connection with these kids that their parents or family or counselors or teachers cannot," says Marquette.

"The businesspeople say, 'Hey, when you graduate from high school or college, you're going to need these skills to compete for tomorrow's jobs.' And we know those skills take root in a rigorous course of study. We know that competition will be extraordinary in this global economy, and so the point is to really begin thinking now about the choices you make as an eighth-grader and how that ultimately will impact your life."

### KENTUCKY STUDENTS ARE TOMORROW'S LEADERS

And those words are the tagline for the Kentucky Scholars program. Tomorrow's leaders are the businesspeople of today—those who come to speak to parents and students about how important it is for students to get a quality education.

Patrick Roberson, vice president of investments for UBS Financial Services in Cincinnati, pitches Kentucky Scholars to eighth-graders and their parents in Kenton County. He says that he sees his function as explaining to students the "why" of education.

He can relate to their skepticism. "I know once I got to middle school, I really wasn't sure why I was learning what I was learning. I remember thinking 'I don't care about Shakespeare...I'll never be in a business that requires advanced math'"—something that his subsequent career in investments wound up disproving (he had to take a math test when he started his first job).

But Roberson tries to emphasize that the value of education goes beyond the specific content. "It's not just what you're learning—it's the process that it takes to get good at something that doesn't come easily to you.

"If your parents tell you, 'I wasn't good at math, you don't have to be either'—I respect your parents, but you're not growing up in same world they did."



Tom Beringer, a pharmacist in Warsaw, became one of Gallatin's presenters because he's hired a number of high school students to work in his stores. "I think today more than ever, because of all the distractions, kids don't realize that the little bit of time you spend in school will make the difference in the rest of your life," he says.

"In rural America, many times education is not stressed the way it should be stressed. The students are not prepared the way they should be prepared, and that first year in college, they get themselves into a little bit of trouble and the first thing they want to do is give up—because they feel inadequate. When in fact, that's the time you need to knuckle down and say 'Look, I can get through this.'"

Mark Santen, who holds the position of general manager of administration at Gallatin Steel, said running through a budget for someone making \$27,000 a year was an eye-opener for the students he spoke to. In the example, after everything else was paid for, only \$50 was left each month for clothes. "They're, 'What? My

Nikes cost 50 bucks!'"

To date, 800-1,000 students have been recognized as Kentucky Scholars. Because the program is still in its infancy, Marquette says she expects that number to grow exponentially in coming years. At least 30,000 students have seen the program's presentation.

While a school district has to follow the basic course requirements, it can customize the program to suit its particular needs. For example, Gallatin County plans to require students to take a certain number of "dual-credit" courses that will earn them college credit for high school work.

Marquette says Kentucky Scholars is considering a "tiered system" of recognition—for example, gold, sil-

## REQUIRED COURSES FOR KENTUCKY SCHOLARS

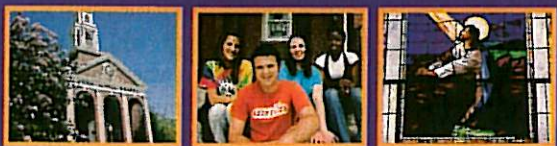
To become a Kentucky Scholar you will need to follow a prescribed set of courses. The minimum required courses for a Kentucky Scholars diploma are:

- 4 credits of English that include: English I, II, III, IV
- 4 credits of math that include: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and a fourth math class beyond that
- 3 credits of science that include: Biology, Chemistry, Physics
- 3 credits of Social Studies: Chosen from U.S. History, World History, World Geography, Economics, Government
- 2 consecutive years of the same world language

Since some schools may call classes by different names, check with your guidance counselor or principal. Individual districts may modify this schedule to suit their needs.

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ver, and bronze levels—that might include requirements for community service, attendance, and grade-point average.

And there might be funds for college involved as well. The Kentucky Scholars Achievement Awards, begun with a \$20,000 donation from Columbia Gas, will award scholarships to students in need of financial aid, based on their essays responding to a community problem posed by their district.

Kenton County was one of the pro-

gram's pilot districts in 2004, and found that Kentucky Scholars helped catalyze a thorough rethinking of its curriculum. "It's kind of helped bring us on this journey of increasing the rigor and relevance of teaching in the classroom in our district," says Teri Brown, formerly director of State and Emerging Programs and now Kenton's director of assessment. "It opened our eyes to many things in the way that we do business in the district."

She cites changes in the way Kenton

teaches math. "In order for all of our students to take rigorous math courses in high school, we needed to make sure that all of our students were taking algebra by the eighth grade," Brown says. "And that meant we needed to change curriculum at the elementary level—so many of our elementary schools now teach the pre-algebra skills, even in the lower grades."

The system also arranged its high school curriculum into what it calls "schools of study"—different courses arranged around areas of career interest (science, technology, engineering, and math; visual/performing arts and media; business and information technology; law, education, health and human services).

Roberson has gotten more subjective proof of Kentucky Scholars' influence on Kenton education.

## LINKS TO RESEARCH

For information on the research, *Answers in the Toolbox*, that is behind Kentucky Scholars and similar programs, go online to [www.KentuckyLiving.com](http://www.KentuckyLiving.com) and type "toolbox" in the Keyword Search box.



His sister, Debbie Sager, teaches in Kenton County and was talking to the mother of a student who'd made an amazing transformation. His freshman year in high school, he'd changed from a kid who'd never been engaged into "Superstudent." He was taking as many advanced courses as he could. He'd gotten involved in student government, was playing a sport, and had joined a club. And he was researching which colleges had the best engineering programs.

Roberson's sister asked the mom what brought about the change, and the mother said, "Well, it all started when this guy came to the school and made this presentation..."

"It shocks them," Roberson says. "It wakes them up."



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Kentucky